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# Embodied Knowledges: In a Postcolonial Classroom[1]

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To speak about postcolonial pedagogy from the vantage point of the Western academy is inevitably to engage with very personal and sometimes confronting questions about how we, as individuals, are situated in relation to the material we bring to the classroom. For me, as an Australian teacher of postcolonial theatre studies, such questions must begin with the possible uses of Aboriginal performance texts in university and school curricula. This focus on the local stems less from an assumption of familiarity with home-grown (as opposed to foreign) texts than from a conviction that in contemporary Australia, in the new millennium, the postcolonial classroom should be understood, with urgency, as a place for the work of reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous communities. Such urgency results in part from the stalling of the official reconciliation process[2] under our current conservative government, whose reign has overseen a general backlash against multiculturalism on the part of white Australians and, in some sectors, more specific resentment about the very gradual—and still very partial—empowerment of various Aboriginal groups. A fiercely debated issue in this political landscape is our prime minister's continued refusal to apologise or offer compensation to survivors of what has been termed the Stolen Generations, those thousands of Aboriginals (mostly of mixed ancestry) forcibly removed from their parents as children during

1 I wish to thank Gillian Whitlock for her invaluable feedback on an early draft of this essay and to acknowledge her work on memoir and the Stolen Generations' testimonials as starting points for my research.

2 A Commonwealth Government act established the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in 1991. Its task was "to promote a process of reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and the wider Australian community based on appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and achievements" (quoted in Casey 55).

an era of government-mandated assimilation lasting from early in the twentieth century until the 1970s.[3] Since the tabling five years ago of the *Bringing Them Home* report, which registers testimony gathered by the Australian Human Rights Commission from hundreds of Aboriginals segregated from their families and communities and often subjected to physical, sexual, and psychological abuse in their new homes, the "stealing" of Aboriginal children has become our most publicly discussed atrocity and, for many intellectuals on both sides of the racial divide, a kind of flash-point signalling the ongoing crisis in cross-cultural relations.

Australia's troubled progress towards a reckoning with injustices inflicted upon indigenous peoples is by no means unique. As Gillian Whitlock notes, "Discourses of reconciliation have emerged in the past decade as one of the most powerful scripts for interracial negotiation in states which struggle with the legacies of Eurocolonialism" (210). Her contention that reconciliation is now a key word/concept in ideoscapes of democracy in "widely dispersed though not disconnected locations" such as Australia, Canada, and South Africa (210), suggests the potential force of a comparative analysis within this field, even though that exercise also has its perils. In particular, recent scholarship warns of two opposing tendencies as crucial pitfalls in postcolonial teaching: the tendency to draw all texts into an incorporating universalism that seeks equivalents—in experience, in outlook, in essence—as a way of understanding other cultures; and, equally limiting, the tendency towards a cultural relativism that positions other cultures as *so* different that there can be no criteria for real engagement. By taking this latter approach, as Satya Mohanty argues, "we may avoid making ethnocentric errors, but we also, by the same logic, ignore the possibility that [other cultures] will ever have anything to teach us" and so "gain only an overly general and abstract kind of tolerance" divorced from understanding or empathy (112).

With these pitfalls in mind, I hope to illustrate the immense pedagogical value of using performative processes such as workshopping, improvisation, and rehearsal as strategies for interpreting (and responding to) both local and foreign plays within a postcolonial classroom. The ensuing analysis is not designed to address more general debates about the effectiveness of performance as a form of pedagogy within academically based drama or theatre programmes; it appears well established by now that performing a text can and does work to produce valid and

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[3] In contrast, the Canadian government has formally apologised for similar policies during what is often termed the "scoop-up period," which roughly corresponds to the assimilation era in Australia.

valuable forms of knowledge.[4] My focus is much more specific, hinging on processes of embodiment that might be situated as part of a classroom agenda of cross-cultural engagement. The classroom discussed here remains a hypothetical one, but by no means one conceived as politically or culturally neutral. It is modelled on what I know of postcolonial theatre teaching in Australia, which happens mostly in academic, liberal arts programmes rather than in profession-based actor training facilities, and which supposes that students will be predominantly Anglo-Australian and mainly middle-class. I am not presuming that most classrooms will necessarily approximate mine, though I hope to elicit productive resonances or, perhaps even more crucially, productive dissonances across a range of teaching situations.

To insist upon a place for performance within classrooms where students are asked to confront texts by and about their racial or cultural others, is to bring issues of embodiment into focus in a particularly fraught way, necessarily raising questions about authenticity, respect, and agency, as it becomes clear that the performing body can never be reduced to a sign of free connotation. In this respect, Jon Erikson explains theatrical embodiment as follows:

> the problem of the body in performance is a two-fold one: when the intention is to present the body itself as flesh, as corporeality [...] it remains a sign nonetheless [...] not *enough* of a pure corpus. When the intention is to present the performer's body as primarily a sign, idea, or representation, corporeality always intervenes, and it is *too much* of a body." (242)

What this implies is that body-based categories such as race can be read, paradoxically, as both *pre*-formed and *per*formed,[5] as historically conditioned, but often anchored in biology. In performance, the tension between the body as sign and the body as corpus manifests or recedes according to the various technologies of representation through which the body is brought into visibility. By technologies of representation, I mean the intentional, mechanical processes used within a culturally inflected context to present an image of the body on stage, whether those processes involve fleshy embodiment, puppetry, multimedia, or even virtual simulation. This yields a Foucaultian notion of body technologies, which suggests that performance entails the enactment of all sorts of power relations, not only among actors, and between actors and their audiences, but also between actors, audiences, and broader systems of ritual practice.

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4 See Dolan (1996), Knowles (1995) and Bennett (1995) for discussions of the ways in which debates about performance as pedagogy have unfolded in the United States and Canada.

5 This terminology is borrowed from Melissa Western's work on the performance of race and ethnicity in recent Australian theatre (2000).

To think about such issues in a pedagogical context, we might first examine the various body technologies embedded in particular teaching texts, researching historical and/or cultural data where necessary. This strategy is designed to allow for meaningful articulations between the performative templates suggested by the script and the body-based exercises developed in response. I am not claiming here that characters constructed according to certain conventions—be they naturalistic, ritualistic, Brechtian, operatic, carnivalesque, or whatever—should only be played in those styles, but rather that we need to identify the representational devices used to depict the body and assess their possible implications, both in their original cultural contexts and in the classroom situation. In this way, my pedagogy aims to combine conventional processes of interpretation with an investigation of performance as a possible site of intercultural engagement.

While various postcolonial plays could be brought into dialogue around specific aspects of representation, space limits my current discussion to just two recent texts: Jane Harrison's *Stolen* (1998) and Jane Taylor's *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1997), both of which deal with issues of testimony and reconciliation following state-sanctioned atrocities, but in different national arenas: Australia and South Africa respectively.[6] My first example, *Stolen*, speaks directly to Australia's current debate about the Stolen Generations. Although Harrison's play premiered just months after the *Bringing Them Home* report was tabled, the project had begun some five years earlier with a commission by the Ilbijerri Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre in Melbourne. Harrison, as writer, worked with a researcher and, during the later stages of the project, with a number of other Aboriginal theatre practitioners to produce a gripping text that draws from real life stories but, for the most part, does not re-enact testimonial as such. Instead, narratives of pain and loss are conveyed through an almost dizzying progression of non-chronological vignettes that sketch the experiences of five Aboriginals stolen from their families as children. Further fragmenting the individual character portraits are occasional dream/nightmare sequences, short sections of documentary footage, and two storytelling scenes that allegorise the figure of the white body snatcher within an Aboriginal oral history/mythology. As Marc Maufort notes, this "exploded" structure, reiterated visually in a poignant moment when one of the children

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6 In each nation, these texts form part of a larger body of "reconciliation theatre," versions of which include Deborah Mailman and Wesley Enoch's *The Seven Stages of Grieving* (1995), Deborah Cheetham's *White Baptist Abba Fan* (1998), and, in South Africa, the Khulamani Support Group's 1997 play, *Indaba Engizoyixoxa (The Story I Am About To Tell)*. In the latter text, designed to spread awareness of issues raised by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings, actual victims of apartheid play themselves.

attempts to reconstruct a photo that has been torn to pieces, functions as an "analogue of the fragmentation that afflicts the characters' lives" (4). Five old iron institutional beds arranged across the stage establish the main setting as a children's home, which, with the aid of a few functional props easily morphs into other spaces: a prison cell, a mental institution, a girl's bedroom (Harrison n.p.). At the very end of the play, the stage is repositioned as a place for formal witnessing when the Aboriginal actors step out of their roles and speak directly to the audience, giving personal responses to the stories of the Stolen Generation.

At first glance, the corporeal technologies employed in this play seem relatively straightforward: in what *we* might categorise as a Brechtian aesthetic, five adult actors demonstrate rather than fully impersonate their characters, moving easily between roles as children, adults, chorus members, white authority figures, and off-stage voices. Except for the fact that the actors themselves are Aboriginal—and need to be so within the cultural, political, and theatrical contexts of a public production—the performance text demonstrates a "radical flexibility"[7] in its use of body-based signifiers. Hence categories such as physical type, age, gender, and even race are brought into representation across bodies that do not always allow a seamless fit, thereby making visible their position within ideology. This kind of dramaturgy models the transformative body that postcolonial theorists often valorise.

But, crucially, there is another kind of body embedded in this text, an essentialised, racialised body brought into sharp relief when the institutionalised children assemble for inspection by a white couple who will choose just one to take home for the weekend. In the stage directions, the scene is described as follows:

> *A bell rings and the children line up centre stage, front. Then, they look at the person next to them and realise that they are not in the right order of lightest to darkest. They rearrange the line-up and stand expectantly, straightening their clothes and looking eager.* (4)

Subsequently, in what becomes a potent visual motif, the children periodically repeat the line-up routine, rapidly learning their ascribed places in the racial hierarchy. Since this careful choreography is never explained in the dialogue, it achieves its full effect only if the actors themselves can be lined up in a similar "light-to-dark" formation. Here, despite the demand that each actor's skin colour must be seen to fit his or her role quite precisely, I would hesitate to classify the representation of race at work as naturalistic, because it seems that something much more strategic is happening. The recurrent line-up routines create a

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[7] The term is Richard Schechner's (6), though the practices to which he refers are relatively common outside the realm of Western naturalism.

spectacle of the actors' and the characters' apparent racial differences—from each other and from non-Aboriginal audience members—to the extent that the Aboriginal body begins to signal its historical status as over-determined, over-classified, which in turn upsets the very dynamics on which the scene hinges. In this respect, the line-up motif might be seen as a performative rendition of Gayatry Spivak's notion of "strategic essentialism," the deliberate foregrounding of particular markers of "pure" difference as part of a "scrupulously visible political interest" (205). The line-ups also crystallise opposing "surface-versus-depth" interpretations of race insofar as the children initially experience Aboriginality as fully embodied (in this case through experiences of loss and trauma), but quickly learn how surface markers of Aboriginal identity (shades of skin) are made to mean.[8]

The strategically racialised body in *Stolen* also functions as the means through which narratives of trauma are enacted as history. Without this specific body technology, generally operating in tension with the flexibly raced, transformative body as outlined earlier, many of the vignettes could be dislodged from their specific historical referents. In particular, the children's games and cleaning routines, which form a central part of the text, are anchored to the Stolen Generations testimonials via corporeal markers of Aboriginality inscribed in/on the actors' bodies. Let me briefly illustrate how this works by describing "Cleaning Routine 2," a particularly resonant scene for Australian audiences. An authority figure, in voice-over, asks the Aboriginal children what they are going to be when they grow up; then, as each child in turn calls out "nurse," "fireman," "circus performer," "doctor," and so forth in a long list, the voice shouts an adamant "no!" Only menial domestic roles or manual labour get a thumbs-up response. Disappointed, the children dance around singing a song about what kinds of work they will and will not be allowed to do, appropriating the tune of "We're Happy Little Vegemites" in a moment of piquant irony. (For the uninitiated, vegemite, a black yeast-based spread represents something of an Australian icon; the song is an advertising jingle originally sung by emphatically white children, who, apparently, would be able to do anything provided they ate their vegemite.) More sombre moments at which the Aboriginal body specifically functions to historicise narratives of trauma are scattered throughout the text. One early scene shows a youth, Jimmy, being beaten while a letter written by his mother but intercepted by the white authorities is projected over his face. Equally disturbing is a series of

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[8] The surface-versus-depth debate about race seems to depend on pitting Foucaultian notions of an inscribed body against phenomenological notions of a lived body. For further discussion of this issue, see Nick Crossley (1996), who argues persuasively that the distinction between the two cannot be maintained.

"unspoken abuse scenes" in which a patty-cake game with its simple refrain of "I promised not to tell" reveals, elliptically, that two of the children have been sexually violated while visiting white homes.

The dialectic between transformative and essentialised body modalities that I have outlined in relation to *Stolen* models a real-world politics of identity that comes into focus at the very end of the performance text, when cast members shed their roles to speak directly to the audience in what might be interpreted as another kind of line-up scene. The actors talk about their own lives, about their ancestry, about the children they have had or will have. One, Pauline Whyman, reveals that she and ten of her fourteen siblings were all stolen. In what constitutes a fairly representative response from reviewers, Jo Litson, writing for *The Australian*, describes this moment as a "blow to the solar plexus," when "your heart goes out to her while guilt curdles your stomach" (16). What I think is happening here is a complex moment of witnessing which fulfils Harrison's claim that her play works towards "healing the rift between black and white Australia" (quoted in Hart 67). The actor, as an Aboriginal stolen from her family, bears the physical inscription (the past) of that trauma—conveyed to the audience though memory—at the same time as she is fully embodied in the performative present. Her role(playing) as the character Shirley and her real-life testimonial as Pauline Whyman are both witnessed as authentic in this finale, although perhaps in different ways. The reviewer appears ideally positioned at this point to become the "second person" implied in all testimonial transactions. In Whitlock's formulation, the second person, the addressee, "is called upon to witness her own complicity and implication in the loss and suffering which is finally being spoken" (209). This forms a necessary part of the process of reconciliation which "demands from the second person an ethical performance of civic virtue that is cast in a particular discursive framework, and which is understood to be an engagement with emotion, and a recognition of shame" (Whitlock 210). Litson's review manifests exactly this response, and I imagine it speaks for much of the wider audience, despite the fact that, in Harrison's words, "there was a lot of sorrow [in the play] but not a lot of blame" (quoted in Hart 67).

If *Stolen* depends so crucially on its Aboriginal actors for both aesthetic and political effect, if it functions so specifically within a testimonial contract between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians—a contract that becomes more urgent with our government's continued refusal to witness the testimonies of the Stolen Generation in any ethical way—how can we take this text into a pedagogical context that would seem to strip away much of its performative power? If scenes are workshopped using a colour-blind casting model, what are the possible politics of embodiment for non-Aboriginal students—or for Aboriginal

students, if there are any in the class? Can white actors understand aspects of Aboriginality through an empathetic performance of roles marked specifically as outside their racial/cultural experience? Perhaps. But I would suggest that the more valuable task here would be a corporeal exploration of race itself as an ideologically loaded category. Enacting scenes using the transformative body technologies that the play itself incorporates might produce credible Brechtian-style performances of Aboriginal stories (alienating assumed signifiers of alterity in ways that could be analysed intellectually), but I wonder whether this really constitutes a praxis of embodiment. Moreover, because so much of *Stolen* dramatises the characters' experiences as children, their specificity as Aboriginals is easily elided in a broader narrative of childhood that positions them as inherently at risk, inherently disempowered in the face of adult cruelty. Such elisions can be understood in terms of Joanne Wallace's proposition that the child's uncertain ontological status lends itself to appropriation within colonial discourse. She argues that the category of "the child," while highly visible, is never fully marked with the signs of culture: the child "remains caught in tension between what one might call the empty and the full, between lack (of personality, attributes, and history) and excess (full natural presence)" (291). He or she is therefore a site of anxiety, a presence without agency. This could explain why the trope of the stolen child figures so prominently in fables about childhood across diverse cultures.[9]

If the discursive purchase of childhood as a co-optative framework allows an easy *entrée* into *Stolen*, my strategy of interference would focus on ways to unsettle that dynamic, possibly by workshopping the line-up sequences in which Harrison's other body technology comes into play so forcefully. One workshop scenario might go as follows:

a) with 8–10 students, I imagine that we have been instructed to arrange ourselves in a line according to physical manifestations of whiteness, most white at one end, least at the other; we must do this in silence, without consultation or argument;

b) then we are told to reassemble because the order is incorrect, so we repeat the exercise, perhaps several times;

c) eventually, when the onlookers (the rest of the class) agree that the line-up is satisfactory, we go ahead and finish the short scene as written.

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[9] In *Stolen*, the Mungee is explicitly troped as a body-snatcher, a mythologised outcast who steals and eats children from the Aboriginal camp. He is made visible when the elders throw magic powdered bone over him, thereby turning him into a pale skin—a metaphor for the white authorities responsible for removing the children from their families.

Of course, there are perils embedded in such an exercise, but, in theory, it brings whiteness into focus as a racial category, an embodied "something" that has to be identified—and even defended—as we establish our position in the line. Richard Dyer's pioneering work on whiteness suggests the import of this kind of cognition: "As long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm" (1). This, in turn, allows white hegemony to reproduce itself, "regardless of intention, power differences and goodwill" (10). The line-up exercise might also raise the issue of Aboriginality that is not necessarily marked by visible racial difference, for instance among students who look white but identify as Aboriginal. The difficulty in categorising such students also works to destabilise hegemonic power relations, because, in Dyer's terms, the power of whiteness as a racial category relies on its exclusive ability to reproduce itself as white (25). In terms of the reconciliation work that *Stolen* aims to perform, I would argue that to dislodge the centrality of whiteness while acknowledging our own position(s) in relation to its constructed parameters—these will vary across historical periods and cultural groups—is to prepare ourselves to choose that second person position, to become witnesses to our own complicity in the theft of Aboriginality that the narratives of the Stolen Generations so poignantly convey.

More fully aware of their whiteness as a privileged though not uncontentious identity, students might productively workshop another scene, titled "Racial Insults," in which Jimmy and an unseen white antagonist hurl offensive epithets at each other, until the action segues to a prison cell where Jimmy hangs himself after writing a final letter to the mother he so desperately wanted to find. My purpose in this particular exercise is to set up a situation through which non-Aboriginal students might experience in more complex ways what it means to be absolutely unable to pass across the technologies of race instantiated at that particular moment in the play. Following Rebecca Schneider's work, I see this moment as one of heightened embodiment, as a fragment of history "passes across a body that cannot pass" to produce an "ontology of error" (11). This error, evidence of a performance that is relentlessly citational, fosters respect for difference—at least theoretically. In this rather counter-intuitive assertion, my thinking is influenced by Spivak's argument that, whatever the "political necessity" for predicating knowledge on identification, and "whatever the advisability of attempting to 'identify' (with) the other as subject in order to know her, knowledge is made possible and is sustained by irreducible difference, not identity" (254). In the scenario I have described from *Stolen*, the embodied narrative of not passing also encapsulates precisely the irony of Australia's assimilationist practices: light-skinned children were

removed from their families, apparently "rescued from their blackness," because they stood "a chance of passing as white" (Frow 358), which in turn was diminished by their very entry into white society. As one witness states in the *Bringing Them Home* report: "They tried to make us act like white kids but at the same time we had to give up our seat for a whitefella because an Aboriginal never sits down when a white person is present" (quoted in Frow 358-59).

Taking my second limit text, *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, into an Australian classroom involves a different set of dynamics, for at least two reasons: on the one hand, the text is likely to be understood as foreign to our particular experiences; on the other, it uses very different body technologies, presenting the performing body in a complex dialectic between the animate, the inanimate, and the animated. In broad terms, this multimedia tour de force, written by Jane Taylor in collaboration with visual artist William Kentridge and the Handspring Puppet Company, investigates issues of truth, reconciliation, and culpability in post-apartheid South Africa. The play's project, according to its author, was/is to examine the ambiguities inherent in the official reconciliation process—"the disjuncture between the testimony of those looking for amnesty and those seeking reparation" (Taylor iv). Different modes of expression register this disjuncture. A chilling vision of apartheid's perpetrators and tacit supporters is dramatised through the politicised reworking of Alfred Jarry's Ubu plays, so that Ubu and his wife are lifted out of their original burlesque world and into a domain where rampant greed and violence are shown to have recognisable, indeed catastrophic, consequences (Taylor iv). Two animal puppets feature within this domain, enabling the presentation of symbolic acts and/or concepts that would be somewhat difficult to achieve with human actors. Ubu's canine henchman, Brutus, figured as a dog puppet with three heads, is a potent reminder of the dogs trained to victimise black South Africans during the apartheid era. Niles, Ubu's advisor and cover-up man, takes the form of a crocodile puppet whose capacious mouth functions metaphorically as a shredding machine, an image Kentridge associates with a society asked to confront its crimes (viii). Projected archival film footage together with Kentridge's crude, Jarry-esque animations punctuate the perpetrator narrative, variously suggesting the extent of Ubu's crimes, the perversity of his desires, and the depths of his self-deception. Interpolated into the narrative of Ma and Pa Ubu's exploits, several scenes reveal the stories of apartheid's victims by using humanoid puppets through whom witness testimony drawn from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings is staged. The play's animations and documentary clips, while seldom used during the spare, sombre witness scenes, nonetheless expand the latter's resonances, often demonstrating what is unspoken—or unspeakable—within the testimonies.

In terms of body technologies, *Ubu and the Truth Commission* provides a surfeit of possible models. While Ma and Pa Ubu, as played by human actors, are fully bodied, they are also paradoxically disembodied by the burlesque performance style and, in particular, by their recurrent representation in (or in relation to) mediatised forms. As Geoffrey Davis notes, "It is primarily the Kentridge animations that determine the characteristic visual language of the production" (69). Pa Ubu takes on some of the physical qualities of his screen double, becoming a cartoon-like figure with exaggerated movements and facial expressions and with a limited repertoire of emotional responses. At times, he almost seems to merge with the bizarre world depicted by the animations. Ubu's embodiment as a character is also modified by his interaction with Brutus, particularly during an early song-and-dance routine in which a composite figure is created by the combination of actor and puppet in various poses, including one that features a dog's head and over-long neck as Ubu's giant phallus. Another image of Ubu with his tail apparently wagging gives visual emphasis to his line: "We are the tail that wags the dog" (7). For her part, Ma also appears as something of a shape-shifter, seeming physically inflated—or what might be termed "over-embodied"—in many of her interactions with Ubu, merely human in her roles as translator and sometime puppeteer during the witness testimonials, and then disembodied when she presents herself, in video projection, as a giant, apparently free-floating head for the rendition of her television interview.

The various puppets in the play comprise a different sort of body technology. In an effort to explain the workings of puppetry as a mode of representation, Steve Tillis describes the puppet as "a theatrical figure, perceived by an audience to be an object, that is given design, movement, and frequently, speech, so that it fulfils the audience's desire to imagine it as having life" (65). For my purposes, there are two important aspects to this definition: that the puppet is always already theatricalised—because it exists only as a particular process of performance—and that it creates a paradoxical double vision as both inanimate and animated, provoking doubt as to its ontological status. We might argue, then, that the puppet occupies a space between embodiment and disembodiment, between perception and imagination. The puppets featured in *Ubu and the Truth Commission* are designed to exploit such ambiguities to various degrees. For instance, the witness puppets, according to Kentridge, were developed as a practical solution to the ethical question of how material drawn from real-life testimonials could be staged:

> There seemed to be an awkwardness in getting an actor to play the witness—the audience being caught halfway between having to believe in the actor for the sake of the story and also not believe in the actor for the sake of the actual witness who existed out there but was not the actor. Using a pup-

> pet made this contradiction palpable. There is no attempt to make the audience think the wooden puppet or its manipulator is the actual witness. The puppet becomes the medium through which the testimony can be heard. (xi)

Put in a slightly different way, we could say that the puppet functions as an embodied space in and through which the viewer—the one who takes responsibility for investing the puppet with life—fulfils his or her part in the testimonial transaction by becoming the "second person" as discussed earlier in relation to *Stolen*, the responsive listener, the necessary complement to the first person narrator in the generic form of testimony (see Whitlock 199-200).

As a way of exploring Kentridge's dramaturgy in the classroom situation, I want to imagine workshopping the puppet scene excerpted below (the witness testimony is given in italics, the translation in plain type as per Taylor's text):

> *Lomlungu wesikhafu esibomuu, wadubula lomntwana ngompu.*
>
> This white man with a red scarf, he shot at the child with his rifle.
>
> *Ndambona eruqa umntwana wam u Scholar.*
>
> I saw him dragging my child, Scholar.
>
> *U Scholar Wayeseswekekile.*
>
> Scholar was already dead.
>
> *Wayemtsala ngemilenze njengenja njengenja ecunyuzwe endleleni.*
>
> He was dragging him by the legs, like a dog, like a dog that is crushed in the road.
>
> *Ndambona esimba umgodi wokufaka ubuchopo buka Scholar.*
>
> I saw him digging a hole—for Scholar's brains—
>
> *Ilanga lalithe nka kodwa suke kwabamnyama xa ndimbona elele apho eli linxeba elingasoze liphele.*
>
> The sun was bright but it went dark when I saw him lying there. It's an everlasting pain.
>
> *Andiqondi ukuba iyakuze iphele entliziyweni yam.*
>
> I do not think that it will ever stop in my heart. (47)

Various renditions of the scene could be attempted:

a) dispense with the puppet figure and have an actor perform the role of witness with another actor translating his/her testimony;
b) keep the puppet concept but have this role performed by an actor with expressionless face plus movements, manipulated by one or two others who also deliver and translate the testimony;
c) have the actors assemble and animate a makeshift puppet, using available materials and play the scene essentially as described in the text.

Assuming that students are able to play these variant scenarios in a committed way, a number of generative issues might arise. Most obviously, performing the scene highlights the idea of mediated testimony, whereas reading it (in English) allows us to imagine that the witness character is speaking directly to a comprehending audience, particularly since the language is so powerful. In all three workshopped versions of the text, students are asked to voice—and listen to—an unfamiliar language, one that, in all likelihood, they have simply skipped over when reading the text. Such performative encounters with the foreign language (Xhosa) prove valuable insofar as they produce, at least theoretically, a sensory, embodied experience of alterity that helps to establish the distance between the words and the actor who now voices them as a cultural gap. In this manner, difference is maintained in the process of engagement. Even though the witness testimony is subsequently translated into English, notions of the "infinite transmissibility"[10] of meaning become problematic. For the actor playing the role of witness in the first (puppet-free) scenario, the cultural gap likely widens, since he/she is being asked to give expression to text that is not understood except when rendered comprehensible by another voice, that of the translator. This particular situation might be examined in reference to Kentridge's point about the awkwardness—and ultimately the ethics—of staging real-life testimonials. It might also raise questions about the relative ways in which the live actor and the puppet lend themselves to metaphor.

Different kinds of issues should emerge for the students using puppets to stage the witness testimony. As they physically manipulate their puppets, the puppeteers have opportunities to develop a corporeal awareness of mechanisms of control, of their own power as mediators, and, hopefully, of the responsibilities that it carries. Juxtaposed to such empowerment is the likely helplessness and voicelessness—the disempowerment—experienced by the actor who plays the role of a puppet. For the group with the makeshift puppet, there may be a developing experiential knowledge of possible connections between animate and inanimate objects as the puppeteers try out ways in which their puppet can be made to signify a particular kind of humanity. Can the puppet technology still function when there is no black puppeteer acting as metonym for the witness as in the original production directed by Kentridge? When comparing all three scenarios, in what ways are the politics of the situation worked out through different citations of the text?

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[10] This concept, drawn from Bill Ashcroft's work on postcolonial language, is more fully discussed in my book, *Sightlines*, but in reference to orality in Aboriginal theatre (Gilbert 85).

Rather than simply transferring knowledge, the pedagogical process sketched here aims to produce, in the moment of embodiment, acts of cognition.[11] Of course there is no guarantee that this will happen, nor is the exercise without its pitfalls. The student attempting to enact the witness might simply become disengaged if unable to find ways of negotiating the cultural gaps manifest in the task. The student playing the puppet may baulk at crossing the ontological gap between human and object. In the hands of inexperienced animators, the strategy of using puppets to represent our cultural others could suggest white ventriloquism at its most basic level. A similar risk applies to the play itself, but is minimised in Kentridge's production by an insistence on theatrical (and political) transparency during all the witness scenes; thus the puppeteers remain highly visible, while the role of the translator is also foregrounded. In this way, the play seems to fulfil its creators' brief to "capture the complex relations of testimony, translation and documentation apparent in the processes of the [Truth and Reconciliation] Commission itself" (Taylor vii).

The experiments outlined are not intended to lead towards authentic renditions of the texts;[12] as David Moody has argued, that would be both impossible to achieve and "an act of critical bad faith to the plays themselves and to their own postcolonial contexts and interventionist agendas" (140). In this respect, I remain mindful of Alan Filewod's warning about the risks of taking a play out of its interproductive field—"the matrix of texts, performances and audiences [that] constitutes a discourse of material practice, and which therefore can absorb and synthesize contradictions" (372). But, I suppose, I *am* claiming the classroom as a privileged space, where protocols of response and established interpretive repertoires[13] might allow us to confront the risks inherent in exploring the vexed politics of theatrical embodiment. By bringing *Stolen* and *Ubu and the Truth Commission* into this classroom within a broadly comparative framework, my aim is to seek echoes, not rigid symmetries. That project is made easier by the fact that these plays have participated quite visibly in the transnational discourse of reconciliation

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11 In this respect, my approach is based on Paulo Freire's contention that "education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information" (53).

12 Nor is my approach designed to produce vicarious experiences of otherness that are not critically interrogated.

13 The concept of "interpretive repertoires," borrowed from discourse analysis, refers to "systems of terms used for characterizing and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena" (Potter and Wetherell 149). In the classroom situation discussed here, a repertoire would be organised around a recognisable range of verbal, physical, and emotional expressions/gestures that are typically used for interpreting texts. Obviously, the repertoires would depend to some extent on the kind of framework set up for the study of particular courses.

discussed earlier, both having been staged outside their countries of origin to great critical acclaim. Their portability reminds us that in an increasingly globalised world the politics of reconciliation, while intensely localised, are not wholly determined within national domains (Whitlock 201). To bring the performing body into this transnational discourse at the very personal level of teaching is to draw attention to the fissures running through postcolonialism as an academic formation, but also—I hope—to realign knowledge viscerally, as well as intellectually.

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